

READING GENESIS TO A BLIND CHILD

I am hiding beside you to tell you
What the world itself cannot show,
That you walk with an untold sight
Beyond the best reach of my light.
Try as you can to bear with me
As I struggle to see what you see
Be born of the language I speak.

Claw, feather, fur, and beak,
The beasts come under your hand
As into the Ark, from a land
That a cloud out of Hell must drown,
But for you, my second-born son.
The sheep, like your mother's coat,
The bear, the bird, and the goat

Come forth, and the cunning serpent.
I am holding my right arm bent
That you may take hold of the curve
Of round, warm skin that must serve
For evil. Now, unbreathing, I take
A pin, for the tooth of the snake.
You gravely touch it, and smile

Not at me, but into the world
Where you sit in the blaze of a book
With lion and eagle and snake
Represented by pillow and pin,
By feathers from hats, and thin
Gull-wings of paper, loosed
From pages my fingers have traced

With the forms of free-flying birds;
And these are the best of my words.
If I were to ask you now
To touch the bright lid of my eye
Might I not see what you see?
Would my common brain not turn
To untellable vision, and burn

With the vast, creative color
Of dark, and the serpent, hidden forever
In the trembling right arm of your father,
Not speak? Can you take this book
And bring it to life with a look?
And can you tell me how
I have made your world, yet know

No more than I have known?
The beasts have smelled the rain,
Yet none has wailed for fear.
You touch me; I am here.
A hand has passed through my head,
And this is the hand of the Lord.
I have called forth the world in a word,

And am shut from the thing I have made.
I have loosed the grim wolf on the sheep;
Yet upon the original deep
Of your innocence, they lie down
Together; upon each beast is a crown
Of patience, immortal and bright,
In which is God-pleasing delight.

Your grace to me is forbidden,
Yet I am remembering Eden
As you sit and play with a sword
Of fire, made of a word,
And I call through the world-saving gate
Each word creating your light:
All things in patient tones,

Birds, beasts, and flowering stones,
In each new word something new
The world cannot yet show.
All earthly things I have led
Unto your touch, have been fed
Thus on the darkness that bore them,
By which they most mightily shine,

And shall never know vision from sight,
Nor light from the Source of all light.
The sun is made to be hidden,
And the meaning and prospect of Eden
To go blind as a stone, until touched,
And the ship in a greenwood beached
Not rise through the trees on a smoke

Of rain, till that flood break,
The sun go out in a cloud
And a voice remake it aloud,
Striving most gently to bring
A fit word to everything,
And to come on the thing it is seeking
Within its speaking, speaking.

James Dickey